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THE WILL

A FARCE

In One Act

By

Mary Meek Atkeson

New York
Orange Judd Publishing Company, Inc.
1922

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by
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GIFT
AUTHOR

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

ALICE, *heiress to her uncle's wealth.*
JANE, *her friend.*
SAM HASTINGS, *Alice's lover.*

The scene is an old-fashioned study. To the right is an open fireplace, the mantel above it decorated with vases and bronze ornaments. At the rear is a desk stuffed with papers, and near the middle of the room a table piled with books. Several dark-toned oil paintings hang upon the wall. Comfortable chairs are drawn up before the fire.

As the curtain rises, Alice, in a white dress with black mourning ribbons, is seated before the fire. Jane, on a low stool at her feet, leans against her knee. The dreamy fair-haired Alice is more beautiful, though Jane's vivacity gives her unusual charm. For a moment nothing is spoken.

THE WILL

ALICE (*looking about the room*): To think that only a month ago dear uncle was in this very room, Jane. It doesn't seem possible, does it?

JANE (*comforting*): But, dear, he was an old, old man, you know.

ALICE (*wiping her eyes*): But every day that uncle lived was a blessing to his friends. Even when he was so sick with influenza last winter all his thoughts were for others.

JANE: I remember how you nursed him through it all.

ALICE: I was just glad to. He was such a dear. (*Dreamily.*) Some of the happiest days of my life I have spent in this old house.

JANE (*teasing*): I guess Sam Hastings had a lot to do with that, didn't he?

ALICE (*frankly*): Yes, perhaps he had. He's a man that any girl would be proud to have for a friend, I think.

JANE (*making a wry face*): I saw him with that rich Miss Upson to-day. I think he might have come to see you oftener when you were in trouble—instead of less.

ALICE: Don't, Jane. You know how some people feel about such things. Perhaps Sam can't bear it at all.

JANE (*impudently*): Huh! He'd bear it all right if you

had as much money as Sallie Upson. I'd be willing to bet on that.

ALICE (*really provoked*): Two thousand a year ought to be enough for any man to expect me to have. I'm sure I thought uncle was mighty generous. And, Jane, I'd like for you to remember that you're talking about my friend when you talk about Sam Hastings. I've sometimes thought——

[*She looks away into the fire. Jane jumps up to hug her.*]

JANE: Yes, I've sometimes thought you did! Forgive me, Allie, I'm a mean and suspicious little beast, so I am.

ALICE: You're not anything of the kind. I wish I had your head on my shoulders. Mine has such wild, romantic streaks in it——

JANE (*kissing Alice's hair*): That's why we love you, dear.

ALICE (*confidentially*): You know I've been thinking of that young engineer we passed on the street last night—the one that's staying at Mrs. Barns', you know. There was something about his eyes—and his chin——

[*A bell rings outside.*]

JANE: Oo! I'll answer it.

[*She returns in a moment with Sam Hastings.*]

SAM (*importantly*): I've come to tell you the great good news!

BOTH GIRLS: News!

SAM: It's about Alice, and it's the greatest thing that ever could happen. You can't guess! (*He stands in front of them beaming.*)

ALICE (*sadly*): I haven't been looking for good news, since uncle's death.

JANE (*impatiently*): Out with it, Sam Hastings. Can't you see we're dying to hear?

SAM: Well, it's got about town somehow that Lawyer Pearson drew up a will for your uncle just last winter.

ALICE: Well, we found it. Didn't you know that?

SAM: But this was a later one. This one was made after you had nursed him through the flu.

ALICE (*dreamily*): I remember the lawyer was here.

JANE: What is it? You are the slowest person to tell news I ever saw.

SAM (*rubbing his hands delightedly*): Why, Alice gets the whole thing—all his property except some keepsakes to his friends.

ALICE: Everything? Oh, surely——

JANE (*stoutly*): Well, I think that's only fair. He wouldn't have lived last winter if Alice hadn't nursed him so well. Everybody says so.

ALICE (*still in a dream*): I did so little—and he gave me everything.

SAM: That's what they say. It must amount to a lot of money. Think of this fine home you can live in—and the big estate, the cattle—and the horses——

JANE: But where is that will?

SAM: Must be among her uncle's papers, so they say.

ALICE: Oh, but I looked them all over.

SAM (*importantly*): I'll bet you didn't go about it in a systematic way. It must be in this very room right now.

JANE (*jumping excitedly up and down*): Oh, this is such great news I must run right home and tell it! Good-by.

[*She runs out.*]

SAM (*tenderly*): Alice, why have you been so cruel to me lately? You must know I've always loved you—and yet you have no pity upon me at all.

ALICE (*with ready tears*): I'm sorry, Sam. Dear uncle was so sick I couldn't think of anybody else. You know I like you.

SAM: "Like" me! I'm crazy about you, Alice. Can't you love me?

ALICE: I don't know. I didn't mean to hurt you, Sam, when you've always been so kind.

SAM (*putting his arm round her*): Alice, I have thought of nothing but you for a whole year. Say you will marry me, please say it, Alice!

ALICE (*drawing away*): I don't know, Sam. I'm so unsettled, now, with this new will and everything. Honestly, I don't think there is such a will, at all.

SAM (*earnestly*): Alice, promise me—promise me right now that you'll marry me—if we do find the will.

ALICE (*listlessly*): Well——(*As Sam tries to kiss her.*) No, no—don't do that. (*Covering her face with her hands nervously.*) Wait till we've found the will!

SAM (*tenderly*): My dear one!

ALICE: I feel—— (*Rubbing her hand across her eyes.*) Sam, I'm not myself to-day. I don't seem to know what I am doing or saying.

SAM (*energetically*): Now, don't you worry about anything, my dear. I'll run down and tell them I'm not coming

back to work and then we can search for that will. I'm sure I can find it in no time. (*He goes out.*)

ALICE (*to herself*): I wonder if I really want him to? [*She stares into the fire.*]

JANE (*running in gaily*): Wasn't that the greatest news! I knew your uncle was a brick, but I didn't know he was as bricky as all that. My, isn't it fine!

ALICE: Yes, yes, I guess so. It's a great responsibility. If I only knew what dear uncle would want me to do——

JANE: You're thinking too much, Allie. Let's look for that will.

ALICE (*fearfully*): No, no, not now.

JANE: Well, then, let's get to work on something to get your mind off your troubles. (*Going to the desk.*) Did you copy those salad recipes you said you wanted?

ALICE (*going to her*): Yes, I did that. They're on those long sheets of paper. I think I'll look over these things again. Uncle made so many little requests I'm afraid I'll forget something. Here's one list: "My best pipe to Stephen Jones; my reading glass to the negro minister; my walking stick——" I've done all those.

[*She pulls out another bunch of papers and looks through them, then stops suddenly, staring at a long paper tied with a red cord.*] Jane!

JANE (*startled*): What!

ALICE (*soberly*): Jane, I've found that will. (*She holds up the paper.*) It's been folded up in something else.

JANE: Hooray! Read it this minute!

ALICE: There's a lot of lawyer words first. Let me see—— "To my dear niece, Alice, since by her loving de-

votion she has saved my life, I feel it is but just to give her in return all that I have to give——" "All that I have to give," Jane.

JANE: Glory be! (*The bell rings. Alice starts up as if frightened.*) Why, what's the matter? Aren't you glad you found it?

ALICE (*nervously*): Oh, no, no. I wish I hadn't. I wish I were dead!

JANE: Alice, are you losing your mind?

ALICE: You don't understand, Jane, what it means. While you were gone I—I promised Sam Hastings I'd marry him if we found the will! And that's Sam now, I know it is.

JANE (*aghast*): What in the world did you do that for?

ALICE (*trembling*): I don't know. He said I had been neglectful—and I hadn't meant to hurt him—and—and I didn't really think we'd find it, anyway.

JANE: And you don't love him?

ALICE: I didn't know then, Jane, honest, I didn't. But when he tried to kiss me I thought of that young engineer, you know, that we saw on the street last night. He is so different somehow—so big and manly and real—I suddenly knew—— Oh, Jane, do help me find out something about him. (*Covering her face with her hands.*) Oh, I'm such a goose!

[*The bell rings again and Alice shivers with fright.*]

JANE: Give me that paper a minute and let me think. (*She goes to the desk and turns her back to the audience for a moment, while Alice walks up and down in great agitation.*) Now, I have it. You needn't tell him you've found the will. (*She hands the paper to Alice.*)

ALICE: But what can I do with it?

JANE (*running to the door as the bell rings again.*) Hide it! There, in one of those bronze figures. He'll never think to look there.

ALICE (*looking about her wildly as she thrusts the paper into the figure*): Oh, if only I hadn't promised!

[*Jane shows in Sam Hastings, pausing long enough to shake her fist at his back, then goes out.*]

SAM (*in great good humor*): Gee, I thought I never was going to get in, Alice. Now, I'll find you that will.

ALICE (*nervously*): Oh, Sam, don't! I—I'm all unstrung. (*Appealing.*) What do we care about an old will, anyway?

SAM: Care! For a thing that means a million! Well, I should say—— (*Remembering himself.*) Don't you remember, Alice, you promised to marry me if we found it?

ALICE: Yes, I remember.

SAM: Well, you can see why I'm so crazy about it. Honest, I can't wait to have it settled. (*He turns to search.*)

ALICE (*trying to distract his attention*): But—but, Sam, I'm sure if I loved you enough to marry you, it wouldn't—— Oh, I'm certain we won't find it, anyway.

SAM: I'd like to know why not? This is all foolishness. What it needs is a little systematic search. Women always look over things a dozen times before they find them.

[*He turns to the desk and begins going through the papers. Alice sinks into a chair and buries her face in her hands. When the papers yield nothing Sam examines the desk itself.*]

SAM (*tapping on the wood*): Ah! A secret drawer! I told you so. (*He jerks out a small drawer triumphantly.*)

ALICE (*giggling*): That's uncle's special imported tobacco.

[*Sam slams the drawer back and turns to the mantel.*]

ALICE (*nervously*): Sam, let's give it up!

SAM: Never!

ALICE (*desperately*): Sam, you don't love me!

SAM (*a bit absentmindedly*): I worship the ground you walk on, Alice.

ALICE (*her handkerchief to her eyes*): No, you don't. You're not interested in me at all. It's nothing but that old will!

SAM (*turning and taking her in his arms*): Alice, Alice —— (*Teasing.*) And are you jealous, dear?

ALICE (*drawing away*): Well, why shouldn't I be?—— With you paying no attention to me? I dare say uncle burned up that will, anyway.

SAM (*evidently disturbed*): Of course he might—— (*Looking over Alice's head.*) There! It's behind a picture. That's where it is!

[*He puts Alice aside quickly and goes to examine the pictures. Then he goes to the mantel, picks up one statue and is reaching for the other.*]

ALICE (*starting up in agonized haste*): Oh, Sam, not that—not that one. (*She snatches up the figure.*)

SAM: I don't see why not! That would be——

ALICE: Oh, but dear uncle loved this Hermes best of all!

SAM (*staring*): It isn't a Hermes, it's a Juno.

ALICE: Well, whatever it is—it's the one he loved best. I can't let any one touch it.

[*Sam tries to watch her, but she waits till his back is turned, then slips the paper into a book on the table.*]

ALICE (*showing the statue*): There! I told you it wasn't there.

SAM (*suspiciously*): No,—it isn't.

[*After Alice has set the figure back, he picks it up and she pays no attention. He whistles and turns toward the table.*]

ALICE (*picking up a book*): I was reading this one.

SAM: That's no reason I shouldn't look it through.

ALICE: But I must finish it! It's the most exciting thing, really.

SAM (*looking at the back of the book*): It's a dictionary! It must be exciting!

ALICE: Oh! Oh, well, didn't you ever get excited reading the dictionary?

SAM (*dryly*): I must say I never did. Alice, give me that book. You know the will's in there. I see the edge of the paper, right now.

ALICE (*stoutly*): Well, every old paper isn't a will. I was writing out some salad recipes on big paper just like that.

SAM: Very likely story! If it's salad recipes, you oughtn't to mind my seeing them. There's nothing secret about them, I reckon.

ALICE: I guess my recipes are my business and not yours, Sam Hastings!

SAM (*now really angry*): Give me that book, I tell you!

ALICE (*with dignity*): Sam Hastings, do you mean you doubt my word?

SAM: Don't I need to—when you promised to marry me if we found that money, and then try to keep it from me? Give it to me!

ALICE (*warningly*): Sam!

SAM (*jerking the book from her*): There it is! With the red string round it, just as I knew it was! Now, what have you to say? (*Jane enters unobserved.*)

ALICE (*snatching the will*): What have I to say? It's this. You think you're mighty smart, Sam Hastings, because you got me to say I'd marry you—when I was off my guard. Now I see what you really are. This isn't a will—it's a won't!! There! (*She tears the paper and throws it into the fire.*) Now, what have you to say?

SAM (*stunned*): But your uncle's legacy!

ALICE: He gave me the best legacy he possibly could, Sam Hastings, when he left me something that would show me what a scoundrel you are. You cared only for my money. Now I know it.

[*She drops into a chair and begins crying.*]

JANE (*indignantly*): I think it's about time you got out of here, Sam Hastings, and never came back! (*He glares at her, but grabs his hat and goes. Jane puts her arms around Alice.*) He's gone, dear. He won't ever bother you any more.

ALICE: Oh, Jane, I hate him! I hate him!—And I've burned up dear uncle's will! (*She cries.*)

JANE (*shaking her*): Listen! That wasn't the will you

burned up. I slipped the red string from one paper to another before I left. That was your salad recipes!

ALICE (*wiping her eyes*): Oh, Jane, Jane!—Why, that's what I told Sam it was!

JANE: Well, it was no lie. And he can't object when he finds out it really was. Honest, dear, I thought I'd scream when I slipped in and found you doing all those big heroics over a bunch of recipes! It was too funny!

ALICE: But where is the will?

JANE (*patting her pocket*): Right here. I took it right along with me. I'll give it back—when you or Sam, one, is safely married to some one else. He'll marry that rich Upson girl soon enough, never fear.

ALICE: Oh, I hate him. How I could ever have thought——

JANE (*excitedly*): Oh, Allie, I found out about that engineer! He's not married, and he's going to stay all summer. And, oh, Allie——

[*She drops upon the footstool, giggling.*]

ALICE: Well?

JANE (*almost overcome*): I—I found out—his name——

ALICE (*shaking her*): Don't be such a goose. Tell me! You know I'm dying to hear. A name makes such a difference!

JANE: His—his name is WILL!!

ALICE: Oh!—Well, now, I think that's wonderful. It sounds like a real man. Don't you like it, Jane?

JANE (*still giggling*): Yes, yes—I like all kinds of wills.

ALICE (*starting up excitedly*): He's wonderful, I know. Let's run upstairs and powder our noses, quick. I must

arrange to meet him right away. I knew the minute I saw him he was the finest fellow in the world. Now, isn't that romantic!

JANE (*hesitating*): But we can't meet him, Allie. We don't even know Mrs. Barns, nor anything.

ALICE (*eagerly as they reach the door*): I don't know how I'll do it, dear, I haven't had time to figure it out. But, Jane (*impressively*), WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY!

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